

THE
***Final
Straw***
A WEEKLY ANARCHIST SHOW

The Final Straw is a weekly anarchist and anti-authoritarian radio show bringing you voices and ideas from struggle around the world. Since 2010, we've been broadcasting from occupied Tsalagi land in Southern Appalachia (Asheville, NC).

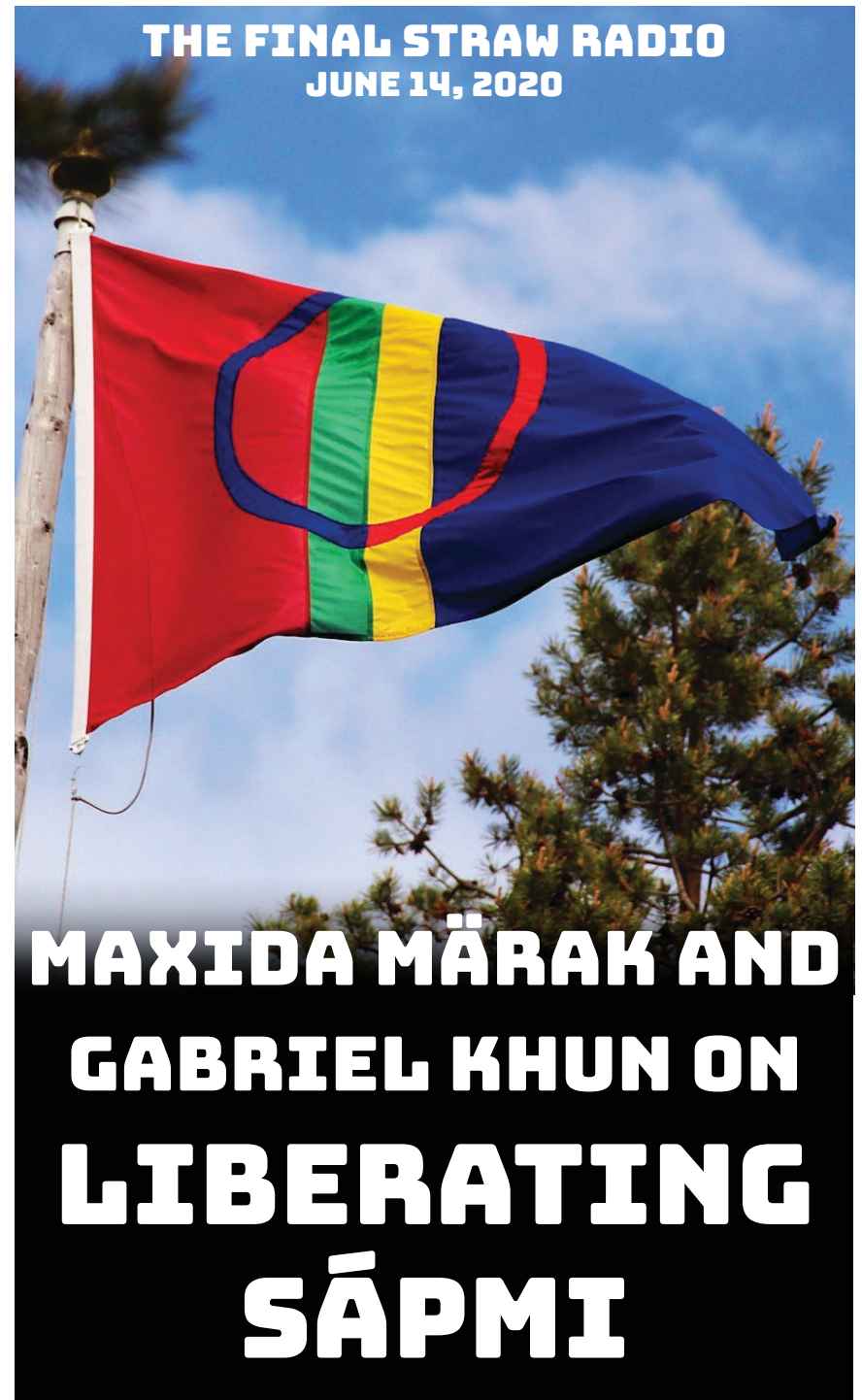
We also frequently feature commentary (serious and humorous) by anarchist prisoner, Sean Swain.

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This week we are pleased to present an interview William conducted with Gabriel Khun and Maxida Mäarak on the 2019 PM Press release *Liberating Sápmi: Indigenous Resistance in Europe's Far North*. This book, of which Khun is the author and editor and Mäarak is a contributor, details a political history of the Sámi people whose traditional lands extend along the north most regions of so called Sweden, Norway, Finland, and parts of Russia, as well as interviews conducted with over a dozen Sámi artists and activists.

Maxida Mäarak is a Sámi activist, actor, and hip hop artist who has done extensive work for Indigenous people's justice. All of the music in this episode is by Mäarak and used with her permission, one of which comes off of her 2019 full length release *Utopi*.

In this episode we speak about the particular struggles of Sámi folks, ties between Indigenous people all around the world, and many more topics!

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friends are Indigenous from different countries. And when we ally and hold each other's backs, I mean the government should fucking beware this new generation coming up, and just how easy it is now to have contact with one another! I mean you know Tim "Zoolman" Hill of A Tribe Called Red? He is one of my closest friends, and just to see how powerful it is when Indigenous people gather as one is just amazing. And I just want to say that I am so grateful for being in this community because it is so powerful and so loving, and they can just keep on trying to kill us but they will not succeed. So never shut up, my Natives!

TFSR: And that was our interview with Sámi hip hop artist and activist Maxida Mäarak and author and activist Gabriel Kuhn about Kuhn's 2019 release *Liberating Sápmi: Indigenous Resistance in Europe's Far North* available now thru PM Press. If you are interested in learning more about Sámi struggles, which cover a lot of ground between government's forcing reindeer culling and anti-mining campaigns, check out our show notes for links from our guests.

GK: - you know with the European Union and special treaties with Norway, since that opened up the borders generally, I think they've lost some of the significance they've had up to 20 years ago. But just right now, I mean all the borders came back up. I just emailed or texted with people a few days ago who live along the Tana River which for a very long stretch, maybe 100km, marks the border between Finland and Norway. And you have Sámi families literally on the opposite sides of the river, so some of them live in Finland and the others in Norway.

And suddenly you now have the borders coming up it becomes very difficult for them to visit one another. So obviously the practical complications that these borders create and have created, they were partly responsible for forced migration historically. As Maxida points out, that would have been my impression from talking to everyone, every Sámi I've talked to in connection with the book, the stress that for Sámi identity those national borders don't matter.

And that would also include the Sámi community in Russia, which especially in the 20th century with the Iron Curtain, was very isolated from the rest of the Sámi community. But my sense is, and Maxida I would assume would confirm that, is that they are a clear part of the Sámi family and community because of the strong historical and cultural ties.

TFSR: Yeah, thank you for talking about that, and thank you so much for your time and your willingness to come onto the show, it was an absolute honor to get to speak to y'all about the work that y'all are doing and your experiences. Is there anything that we missed in this interview that you want to give voice to in closing?

MM: Shoutout to my Natives!!

I think one of the powerful things is that in percent, we are not that many Sámi, and there are not that many Inuits in Greenland, and whatnot, but wow what a huge group we are as Indigenous people. And that is so powerful to see, some of my closest

Maxida Mäarak (MM): My name is Maxida Mäarak, I work as a hip hop artist and producer. I've been acting quite a bit before I started to do music, and I'm also known for being an activist in Indigenous groups and especially for the Sámis, cause I'm Sámi. We are the Native people of the Scandinavian north. We live and breathe in Sweden, Norway, Finland, and parts of Russia. So for people who are political, they will probably know me as an activist-artist, I would say.

I don't know what more I can say, I live in Jokkmokk which is up north in Sweden. I have a daughter, she's 8 years old, and yeah that's me. Parts of me.

Gabriel Kuhn (GK): So my name is Gabriel Kuhn, I was born and raised in Austria, then I left the country about 25 years ago, and moved around a lot until I ended up in Sweden in 2007, and I've been living here since and work as a writer and translator. And I'm involved in various social and political projects.

TFSR: So, firstly I'd love to start out with a question for Gabriel. We are here to talk about your book *Liberating Sápmi*, which came out this year (2020) from PM Press. Would you lay out some groundwork about this book, and how you came to writing and compiling it?

GK: Yeah! So the book, basically it's an introduction to Sámi history with a focus on the political struggle of the Sámi people and anti-colonial resistance. The book is laid out in two major parts, there is an introduction, which I wrote and is called "A Short Political History of Sápmi", so Sápmi being the traditional homeland of the Sámi people. And that provides general background information, and then the main part of the book which makes up about two-thirds are interviews with twelve Sámi artists, activists, and scholars. So Maxida is one of them.

In addition there are illustrations in the book, photographs, and artwork. And there is a resource guide at the end of the book, which has information about more English language literature and

music and film and some online sources that people can look into.

And the reason I got the idea for the book was that I thought such a book was missing on the english language market. There are quite a few books about the Sámi people in English, some of them are very good, but most of them are academic studies, they are hard to find, or they're quite expensive. So my intention was to do a book that was accessible, easy to read, easy to get, affordable, and that's how the idea came about.

TFSR: I loved the interview component of the book, the introduction was really well done and I loved it too, but I also loved the intertwining of the interview component in the book and bringing in voices from all over Sápmi and all of these different backgrounds.

GK: That was the most important part of the book!

TFSR: Definitely! And I wonder Maxida if I could ask you, insofar as this is possible would you speak about the history of Sápmi and the history of Sámi people who live on the land?

MM: Wow that's a big question! Well we are Indigenous people, so we've been where we are for what you can tell for over 10,000 years. The hard part is that Sweden always wanted to categorize us as a "minority", which we are, but not just a minority. We are Indigenous, and I think that one of the hard things has been to proving that because we have a history of not leaving trails. That we are guests in nature, so we haven't left anything to find really, no big marks. But we are Indigenous people, we have been very isolated because we live in the northern part of Sweden which is for many people I think unknown ground. When you travel far up north in Sweden, and I'll talk just about Sweden-Norway-Finland, it's a lot different. The landscape is a lot different from the middle part of Sweden and down to the south. So it's kind of hard to live there if you don't know how to use the ground and how to hunt and fish. And so we had been kind of isolated.

– 20% of your herd because your herd is too big'. And this is one of some of the most current, prominent examples of conflicts in court between Sámi and the governments.

TFSR: It's really reminding me of the government of Canada and how that government really gate-keeps and detrimentally affects the lives and identities of the Indigenous people who live there. I would be interested in hearing y'all's take on, so Sápmi is a pretty large territory, it spans many hundreds of miles, and it gets crossed by several colonial borders, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia.

I know in Canada, there are many peoples, the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Mohawk, and Coastal Salish and others, all those territories are crossed by a very heavily militarized colonial border, to say nothing of the colonial border in the South. And I'm wondering how that colonial border has affected the relationships between folks who are Sámi who live in Sápmi. I wonder if y'all have any words on that?

MM: I would say that this a beautiful thing with this culture, is that we still see Sápmi as, if we could say, one land. So for us we know, I mean I am Lule Sámi, which is one type of Sámi, and my people we go way into Norway. So I speak the same language and have the same traditional clothing as a lot of people in Norway, so for us they [the borders] are non-existent. We really see Sápmi as one area without borders, but of course we know that they are there! It affects the reindeer herding a lot. But I think for us, that is one of the most beautiful things in the Sámi culture is that we don't have any borders, we have family in every country, and travel like nomads did before over the borders and everyone knows everyone.

Politically, we definitely notice it.

GK: The practical problems, just right now I mean with the pandemic-

MM: UGH oh my god!!

by saying essentially that if you don't herd reindeer you're not Sámi? Is that correct?

GK: What is true specifically in Sweden you have this strong distinction which comes from a law from the early 20th century between reindeer herding Sámi and non-reindeer herding Sámi. There were some particular rights granted to reindeer herding Sámi that were not granted to other Sámi, and that is a classical example of a colonial divide and conquer strategy that has caused big problems also within the Sámi community which maintain to this day. So I think this is the part that you are probably referring to.

MM: Yeah I mean, parts of this definitely still exist. Like I said before, you have to have a membership in a Sámi village to have reindeer for example. And with having a membership you get specific rights, and if you don't have a membership you don't have the same rights. And that is also a part of that whole history and what Gabriel talked about, and that has definitely been – and still is! – a very toxic conflict in Sápmi, that forces Sámis to fight against each other because we still have families that try to get back their memberships in these Sámi villages, but there's not enough space for them to have reindeer. We are only allowed to have a certain amount of reindeer, because we only have this and this much land to be on.

So I mean the conflicts that we have in Sápmi are horrific, and that is a definite result of the Swedish history and how they've treated us. Now we are left to solve all this without any rights as an Indigenous people, and it's very hard to solve these conflicts. So that definitely still exists, that the reindeer herders have rights that non-reindeer herders don't have.

GK: But then one could add maybe that the rights of the reindeer herders are also controlled by the government. So that's where the forced culling comes in for example, because the number of reindeer that a specific Sámi village can have is still determined by the nation state government. If the numbers are too big, the government will come in and say 'ok, you have to slaughter – whatever

Then around 16th century, like in many other places in the world, the Church became very central and started to travel. And to make a very long story short they started to go farther up north and of course tried to get the Sámis into the church for the same reasons as.. I mean they treated the Sámis the same way they treated Indigenous people all around the world. So it was a battle between religions I would say. Only the fact that Sámis never went to war, we don't even have a name for war in the Sámi language. We've never been a people of war.

We've been mistreated and killed, and slaughtered, like other Indigenous people. And I can just go on and on about how they have been treating us. I can say that the Sámi culture is very different from the Swedish culture, which is also I mean, what I notice is that it's hard to combine, the Swedish culture and the Sámi culture, or the non-Sámi culture and Sámi culture because we live a lifestyle where the goal is not profit. We have reindeer, we still do reindeer herding, we are the only people in Scandinavia that does reindeer herding. In Sweden we have no wild reindeer anymore, so it's just like cattle but they are free. And we have the language, our history of the yoik [traditional Sámi singing and music], like I said I could go into specific areas, so if there's anything specific you want to talk about I can tell you.

TFSR: I mean, this is a very complex question, because how do you distill 10,000 plus years of history of a people in a short answer to a question. But I think that the groundwork that you laid just now will be very useful for listeners in just conceptualizing the things that we are speaking about. And I do wanna talk about reindeer some more, I wanna talk about music, I wanna talk about a bunch of other stuff that I think will come up organically.

MM: I can tell you one thing that I usually tell people that don't really know what Sámis are. And that is that I feel more related to my Native American friends and my Inuit friends than I feel related to my Swedish friends. So our culture is very similar to the other more known Indigenous people, and that's a good way to explain it.

That we are not Swedish, the culture is very very different from the Swedish culture.

TFSR: Yeah that makes a lot of sense to me, and there was a question that I had later in the interview about sort of the construction of race and the construction of whiteness as it relates to Sámi folks..

MM: That is a very interesting topic! A very dangerous one too.

TFSR: Especially because of, I was born and raised here on Turtle Island [decolonial name for the so-called US] and my understanding of race is very specific and very culturally rooted here. And I was wondering if you had any words on the construction of race and whiteness as it relates or doesn't relate to Sami folks or you specifically?

MM: This is so interesting because in Sweden, they never ask me this question because the topic is so toxic. And in Sweden we don't say "race", like you can't even mention it. I've been to the US or Canada, and there people will come up to me and say "what race are you?" And you could never do that in Sweden, ne-ver do that! That word is like, bad. Which is for good reasons, often. But for Sámis it's very interesting to talk about, because one thing that we don't always have in common to other Indigenous people is that you can't always tell if a person is non-Swedish, or if they're Sámi. We look very different.

Like I have friends that are very tall, very light skinned, you couldn't tell the difference between a non-Sámi person and that person. But that person could still be a Sámi. And then I have friends and my own family who are very dark, like I said, people ask me all the time where I'm from. They can't really put a finger on it where I'm from. And that is one of the of course terrible things when it comes to racism, that you get categorized in what race you are and valued by the tone of your skin. And that is horrible! But it has also been one of the things that I think has been hard for Sámis some-

membership.

And this is the same thing that the Swedish Democrats are doing now, like, either you are Swedish or you're not. You claim to be Sámi, then get the fuck outta here. If you want to still be in Sweden, then 'act Swedish'. I can just see history repeating itself once again.

But like I'm saying, this is also very interesting, we live in a time now of climate change for example, and now we have this fucking coronavirus just taking over the world. And I can almost laugh and say they've been trying to kill us Indigenous people for ever! But they never fucking succeeded, and why is that? Because in the end the knowledge that we have is the most important knowledge. That is one thing that I notice now in Sweden, now people are starting to get more interested! Like 'how do you live up there?' and they want to learn, even vegans are thinking about learning how to hunt. Because we see that when the world collapses, money and guns don't work, you have nothing!

That is a war that everyone is prepared for. So if you have guns and money and power, you can fight a war. But with climate change and a virus?? The most important things to know is Indigenous knowledge, that is how you survive. I just want to say that because that is a change that I see now, that now for the first time I hear people becoming more interested in how we live. This is also probably history repeating itself, and this is probably why they never succeeded in killing us. Because something always happens in the world, like catastrophe and trauma, and when it comes to that it's a special kind of knowledge that you need to know. It's a special way of living that you need to know that will make us all survive. And I just find that quite interesting actually!

TFSR: That is really interesting! This gets into a question that I had specifically about reindeer herding. I was interested in reading Gabriel's introduction to Liberating Sápmi, sort of horrified to read that Sweden, or like the colonial governments, were sort of gate-keeping Sámi identity, and maybe this is a misrepresentation and please let me know if so, but gate-keeping Sámi identity

those people are, because they let these ‘minorities’ who don’t speak their language or whatever.

But what it essentially means on the ground is that you deny them all civil and democratic rights which are essential as a foundation of sovereignty and self determination. Or if you want to put it the other way around, the only way that Sámi can get civil and democratic rights is if they become fully assimilated as citizens in the nation state project.

And this is a very deceptive, and thereby also a very dangerous form of, and I would speak in terms of ongoing racism in that case that these parties represent. But also as Maxida said you can see that very concretely here in Sweden, for example the Sweden Democrats are very clear in wanting to take away the exclusive right to reindeer herding from the Sámi. In Norway, the Progress Party is very clear about wanting to abolish the Sámi Parliament, which is one of the most important at least symbolic political institutions of the Sámi, and they want to turn it into alternatively a museum or a hotel or whatever.

So those attacks are very clear, this is nothing hidden, but there are sometimes accompanies by as I said these statements ‘oh but of course the culture is great and the culture is beautiful’ so this is very dangerous.

MM: Yes this is coming back to that question that you asked before about race, cause here it becomes very important that we have to claim our rights and they question like, either you are Swedish or you are not. What are you? So we get questioned, like Gabriel said, they want to take our rights away. Because if we live in Sweden and we claim to be Indigenous, then why should we have special treatment? That is one thing that they really push out, like, no special treatment for you guys. And this is just history repeating itself. And this is also why some people have memberships in Sámi villages and some people don’t. There are Sámis that did reindeer herding before the Swedish government and the history, they let them keep their membership in the Sámi village, and if you did not do reindeer herding you got kicked out from the village and lost your

times, that we have to hold on so tight to the other cultural things that we have as Sámis because you can’t really tell by just looking at us all the time.

And I know I’ve heard stories from my elders that when Sweden came, and when I say “Sweden” I mean the church or the people who collect the taxes, they would actually tell Sámi women that they think she was cheating, fooling around, because they had kids who looked so different, you could have one kid that was so dark and one that was so light. So, I mean that is a question that I think is even toxic to talk about among Sámis actually.

Of course we have groups in Sápmi that are very against mixing between Sámis and non-Sámis, still! Like that you should keep the blood “pure”. And more areas are more into that than others, and definitely how connected you are to the reindeer herding, I mean only 10% of the Sámi population in Sweden is working as a reindeer herder. That’s not a lot, but it’s still one of the biggest and most important thing in Sámi culture and that becomes very important, the question of are you in the reindeer herding business or not. And how much of non-Sámi blood do you really have, I mean that is definitely a topic but it’s very toxic to talk about.

And do you have a Sámi last name? I belong to one of the people, like I do have a Sámi last name. And many people don’t, and there’s a reason for that, Sweden came and took it!! I mean, we see now the results of what they’ve done to the Sámi people that is very hard for specific groups in Sápmi to “be” a full Sámi. If they don’t have a last name, they don’t do reindeer herding, they don’t have a membership in a Sámi village. And that is nobody’s fault but Sweden’s and Norway’s.

So yeah, definitely, this is something that does exist.

Can I give an example? I have such a good example, like I have a daughter, she is NikkeSunnas, she is turning 8 this summer. I come from a very culturally Sámi family, Mäarak, and my grandfather, he passed away this December. He was a living legend, and now he’s just a legend, but he was one of the greatest people we’ve had in Sápmi. He was the first Sámi to become a priest, that combined this other religion with the church. He helped so many people, he

brought back yoik to the church when it was still forbidden, when it was a sin. So my family's very known for that part of the Sámi culture, the yoik and the storytelling. And my daughter's father, his name is Pärak, and he comes from a very known reindeer herding family. They've been doing reindeer herding since the beginning, and his grandfather was well known, well known. So my daughter she is now brought up in such a strong Sámi culture family, like she has 2 heavy last names, and her first name is also very heavy "NikkeSunnas Mäarak Pärak". She knows how to ride a snowmobile, a four wheeler, she has reindeer, we have a lot of cottages up in different places in Sápmi. She has the whole package, and she looks like a little elf, you know?

They will never, no one will never question her ever of her heritage, where she's from. Everybody knows her parents, her parent's name, grandparents, the areas that we're from. I mean, the history goes way back, no one will ever question her. She has a friend, and I won't mention her name, but her mother is, well we say she is mixed. She is a little bit Sámi, a little bit Finnish, a little bit Swedish, a little bit something-something, you know? And her mother, I mean she was searching for her Sámi roots when she was a grown up, so she has not been brought up in the Sámi culture. She has a daughter with a man from France, so the kid is very mixed I mean she's amazing. So my daughter and her friend they went to the same preschool, which is a Sámi preschool for the Sámi kids and they can speak their language and get a foot into Sámi culture. It's mainly for reindeer herding kids.

When they were supposed to start school, this friend went to the Swedish school instead of the Sámi school. And the main reason why she started Swedish school instead is because her parents wanted to spare her from being that kid in the class that is the least Sámi of them all. She has no cottages, nobody knows her grandparents, she has no connection to the reindeer herding whatsoever. Like she's just a kid, but she is of course Sámi! She has Sámi blood! But she has not been brought up in a Sámi culture family. Which can actually make it pretty hard, because all the other kids are so connected, we have this – I don't know what it is – but I mean it's

have a membership can you have reindeer. And we have specific areas in Sweden for every village which can have reindeer on. And on those areas, for every specific village or tribe, we have fishing and hunting rights. And we are the only ones who actually can fish and hunt there, because we are the so called protectors of it. So people won't come there for vacations or a sports trip, or whatever. And so that's one example, they want to open up the Sami villages and make it free for everyone to have reindeer, and everyone to fish and hunt.

And the result of that would be catastrophic! We would lose everything! So I mean, yeah we are definitely affected, and affected in ways of course that they are just racist pigs that hate everyone that is not white.

GK: So if I can add one thing that I think is interesting, if you observe the especially the far right parties that now are in all the parliaments of the Nordic countries, so the Sweden Democrats here in Sweden, and the so called 'Progress Party' in Norway, and the True Finns in Finland. I think if you look at their policies toward the Sámi, it's interesting because it reflects a trend on the far right that goes from let's say traditional very crude forms of racism based in biology to you know, what is sometimes referred to as 'ethno-pluralist' or basically cultural forms of racism. I find it interesting that sometimes you can have representatives of those parties pay lip service to cultural traits of the Sámi – the language, or traditional clothing, or whatever – something that appeals ideologically to their idea of national coherence and unity and whatnot.

However, at the same time all of those parties explicitly deny any special social or political rights to the Sami as Indigenous peoples or just minorities -

MM: Exactly!

GK: - So what you end up with is they are allowed to be part of the nation state project of Sweden or Norway or Finland, as some kind of exotic spice or possibly a showcase of how supposedly 'tolerant'

people can concretely support Sámi struggles today if they wanted to. I was wondering just a very practical thing, when this is going to be aired can you add links? Cause there are cases that are ongoing about resistance to development projects, mining, there is a big plan for a railway that is supposed to be built on the Finnish side of Sápmi. And there are ongoing court cases about different things, land rights, hunting, the forced culling of reindeer herds, so there is information that people could access and they could spread it. Very often there is very concrete information on those websites, about how to get involved.

TFSR: I would be interested to hear from both of y'all about, Maxida you mentioned far right Nazis and racist political parties. We have all seen the rise of a street level and government level far right, alt right, and fascism all around the world. I'm wondering what kinds of impacts that has had on Sápmi and on y'all specifically.

MM: It's very ironic! Because a lot of people are like yay, because we have the Swedish Democrats (a racist political party). And I often get the comment that 'oh they will love you Sámis because you are the native Swedes!' And that is definitely not the case, no no no. They are against probably everything that we do and especially the reindeer herding. And like all the parties, except for the left ones unfortunately, are for for example the mining industry. And the Sámi people especially the reindeer herders take up so much land.

I mean, they are against everything that is not "really" Swedish culture. And we are I think, when you start to talk about what Swedish culture is, is where you can really see that the Sámis are different from the Swedes. So I mean, of course we are affected by it, and if they would get more power than they have it would be a definite issue for the Sámi villages and for the reindeer herding industry, definitely. They want to open up the Sámi villages, and this is kind of hard to explain because then I'd have to explain what exactly a Sámi village is, but you could almost call it a tribe. And in this so called 'tribe' you have to have a membership, and only if you

a special connection, we share everything and all the kids go to the reindeer herding things, and all the kids go to the cottages during the summer and the wintertime.

And this kid would be an outsider from that. And she will get questioned when they grow up, like people will start questioning her "how much Sámi are you? Where are you from? Do you really belong here?" I won't say that that would definitely happen, but there is a risk.

I wouldn't act the way that her parents did, because I believe that we are actually developing now and are not as harsh as we were before. But I mean, of course there's a risk, and I don't think the Swedish people know this. That there is such a cultural difference between the Sámis and the non-Sámis that they wanted to spare her from a young age from not being the outsider who wasn't Sámi enough. So, that's just an example. I've been thinking a lot about this, like did they do the right thing? I think they should have put her thru Sámi school, cause she will probably grow up like her mother and wonder like, hey why did you do this? Like I have a connection to this world and you made a choice for me. Because this is in one way a choice, I know this for a fact because I live in Jokkmokk. And in Jokkmokk there is only 3,000 people in this little town, so here it's very much like "did you go to the Sámi school or not?"

If you didn't you have to explain yourself, why? Ok, so now you wanna become a Sámi?? you didn't have to go thru all the shit that we did, that went to the Sámi school, getting bullied and what-not. But now that you are a grown up, now you want to become a Sámi, and have the traditional costume and.. ok.. you know what I'm saying? I mean, you can see this in different cultures but in Sweden I don't think the people have any idea of how it is.

TFSR: Yeah, thank you so much for that example. I think that what you're bringing up is making me think of really just complex currents of understanding and belonging, especially in communities and in people that are heavily impacted by the ongoing violences of colonialism and how complex that can look.

Gabriel, I would love to ask a little bit more about the book and about your process in writing the book, and about sort of how you approached this kind of research and history work as somebody who is outside of the community that you are seeking to uplift and do this kind of work with. And I'm wondering what sorts of things should other researchers keep in mind in your opinion if they are seeking to do this kind of work as well?

GK: So I think this is a very important question. It's also a question that makes me slightly uncomfortable because just the fact that I decided to do this book as an outsider doesn't necessarily mean that I know how to do that work, or that I did it the "right" way. So I'm sure there are plenty of things I could have done better, I'm sure that people have very valid criticisms, in general I don't think there is a blueprint for how to do this.

So I can say in response to your question, it's all going to be very subjective. Obviously I gave that much thought before I embarked on the project. I mean, this was in many ways but also in this way a very special project for me because let's say I work on a book about sports, or I work on a book about straight edge, I do not question my validity as an author. If I feel I have a good idea for a book and I find a publisher who wants to release the book, then I get to work and do the best I can. But I don't really go thru a process of asking myself "is this really my place?"

Now with this book, that was a very big question, that was the decisive question. At the beginning I felt that I had a good idea but I was not sure whether I was the right person to do it. So the first thing I did, which I guess maybe is the first part of answering your question, the first thing I did was basically to look for approval within the Sámi community. Now the Sámi community is no monolithic block, people have different opinions, there are no individual Sámi who can speak for the whole community. But I was looking for feedback and opinions of people I knew, and people whose thoughts for different reasons were particularly important to me. And I mention this because – oh and I also mention it in the preface to the book – I remember there was one very important phone conversation I had

shows with a lot of them. And I've been criticized for sitting with people who vote for different parties than I do. I'm very left, my heart is to the left. But I have friends that are from different parties, and of course there are parties in Sweden that I would never ever socialize with. Like any racist party, I would never do that. But I've been criticized for having friends who vote for different things than I do.

But then I tell them, they meet me and I'm the first and only Sámi they will ever talk to, and they hear my history, maybe I will change someones political views. Maybe they will think different the next time the question about mining industry comes up, and they will remember me. And they will remember that I respected them, and they will remember my story. And maybe the outcome will be different.

So I just think that love and respect, I mean it sounds very clichéd but that is actually very true. The dangerous thing with activists is the people who do it for the wrong reasons. Just for the fight. And in the end we don't want the fight, we want peace. We have to live next to each other, we have to know how to combine different worlds, that is the only way that we can survive in the end is to get along. Not to kill each other, not to fight. So I think that the true activists need to have that in mind. That of course I want the left to be on my side, but I also want the right to be on my side. And if they are on my side, they will become left!

TFSR: You know, the whole love and respect thing being a cliché, people really respond to it positively. And I see people from all over the world saying it, we just need to understand each other. So thank you for saying that.

MM: Of course I wanna say too, Nazis and racists are a completely different question. Just to be clear.

GK: Just real quick, since we are not at the peace stage yet, but there are struggles ongoing, I just wanted to get back real quick to what you said earlier, what was implied in your question about how

on our side, but for the right reasons and in the right way.

And you have to aim high. You have to aim for the Swedish government. You can't just be a grassroot, you know? That's what I said when I started as an artist, and some people started to question me when I went to big events with all kinds of people like known artists and politicians, like 'why is she there, she used to be in the woods screaming?' yeah I used to be in the woods screaming, but my goal was to be in on the fucking round table!

I have to be up there with the big horses, to speak out because I need them on my side. Not just the grassroots community, you have to aim high. So I want the Swedish government, that's my fucking goal, to get them on our side. And hopefully the next generation are smarter, but it's important to not just look at the leftists, cause then we put ourselves in that little group one more time. The group needs to be bigger and more welcoming. The rights that we claim, they are weird! Like why shouldn't we have our rights? it's common sense. I mean if we start to educate people in Swedish history, colonization, what is actually been done to the Sámi people, what is happening NOW to the Sámi people, a lot of people will understand.

Cause I believe in the good in people. The dangerous thing is when you believe that most people have bad intentions. If that is what you think about everyone you've already lost. And I have to believe in the good in people. Maybe I have to say things ten times before you get it, but the tenth time, maybe you'll get it. And then you will come over to my side. Cause in the end it's about human rights, you can rape a person, you can kill a person, and the police talk to you for fucking 24 hours and then you're out again. But if you kill a wolverine, you get two and a half years prison?! And that's only for reindeer herders, cause our cattle are free, so that's why we aren't allowed to protect them, cause they're free. Like if we had them as cows or pigs, that is different rules. But only Sámi people have free cattle, so we have different rules. I mean, that's just an example of how it looks today.

And when you tell people this, a lot of people actually understand. I've met all the big politicians in Sweden, I've done TV

very early on with Anders Sinna, a Sámi painter who Maxida knows well.

And I'm a big fan of his work, and I also wanted him to be one of the people in the book that I interviewed, which then he agreed to. And so very early on in the process I had a conversation with him on the phone and I presented the idea to him and was just wondering what he thought. And quite frankly, had he said at that point "ah, I don't think that's a very good idea" or "I don't think you should be doing a book like that", I might have dropped the project right away. But he didn't say that, and he was rather encouraging, and so I reached out to more people who I also got encouragement from. So thru those steps I started to see a path that I thought I could follow and reach a satisfying result.

Now, what was important along that path, I think a lot of that is common sense although I'm aware of the fact that historically people who have written books about communities that they themselves don't belong to, didn't necessarily follow those common sense guidelines. But one thing that I felt was important was that I was very clear about my position and what I was able to do and not able to do. So I have no firsthand experience of Sámi culture, I am not an expert scholar on Sámi culture, my approach comes from a longstanding interest in Indigenous peoples and their struggles for justice. And so because of this interest throughout the years, because of travels I did and studies I did and conversations I had, I felt that I acquired enough knowledge that allowed me to basically build a platform in this case for Sámi voices to reach a broader international audience.

So to make this really short, I just felt I could be a facilitator to spread knowledge that I thought was important.

And then the second part related to that, and this is maybe even more common sense, is that in the process of working on the book, obviously I am 100 percent dependent on Sámi contributors and Sámi advisers. And in that process you gotta be respectful, you gotta be honest about your intentions, you have to acknowledge people's contributions, put the community at the center of the project and not yourself. And again, I cannot speak for how well I man-

aged to do that, but this is what I tried. I can maybe add one more thing that I think helped in this process, which is that this is not a book that I will make a lot of money off. This is not a book that helps me with an academic career that I do not have. And it helped I think because those aspects add yet another layer of ethical questions that I think are difficult sometimes to deal with. So luckily, I didn't have to deal with those. So I think that also made it in a sense easier.

I think there are very general guidelines that would probably be useful for anyone working on such a project, but then of course it very much how that plays out specifically very much depends on the specific project that people are working on. Where they are and what their position is, what their relationship is with the communities they write about. So, exactly, there is no blueprint, I think there are some general guidelines, but if you decide to do a project like that these specifics you have to work out in that specific project you're working on.

TFSR: One thing I am curious about, Gabriel and Maxida, what kinds of support for Sámi issues is there among far left and anarchist spaces and anarchist people in Scandinavia and any invitation or provocations that you might have for how people, people around the world but specifically how people on the land can have y'all's back a little bit better or if they're doing something really well and you want to name that, I would love to hear.

GK: How about this, I can say something about my experiences here in the broader activist community because that in a sense there was also a, I don't know if motivating factor is the right word, but it played into my idea of doing this book. And I know that Maxida has things to add to what I'm going to say, and then we can maybe look at more specifically what especially people outside of the Nordic countries can do to support Sámi struggles.

So if I just speak about this, my experience here with the so called activist community, it was very surprising to me when I first came to Sweden in 2007 because from the time I spent in North

happens here a lot, there's a running, not a saying but, but the Indigenous people here who have been kind enough to talk to me about issues of decolonization is lean into the discomfort, because colonialism affects everybody and it affects you, the colonizer as well, and it disproportionately affects people who are impacted by the ongoing violences of colonialism and colonization, but it affects everybody. Decolonization is an uncomfortable process. It's not like sunshine and rainbows and puppy dogs, it's a very uncomfortable process so like, that's making me think of conversations that are happening here about the specific situations that are happening on this landmass. But thank y'all so much for going into that!

I'm wondering if you have any ideas on, or if you even want to have more of a solidarity with the far left and what do you think that will take if that's a desired thing.

MM: Definitely, but still I think it's also a bit dangerous because you still want the right people to be on your side. The far left can also be fucking crazy. And that's one of the things that I try to tell people who come out and ask us is you have to stop the fight. People love to put themselves into different groups and just fight among those groups, the more groups the better. And I try to remind people that what is the goal? My goal is to get people to be on my side. And if I just stand there and scream and disrespect people, and expect people to know everything about me already before they open their mouths. So you want to have people from both sides to have our backs.

Of course not the far right, right? But I feel it's dangerous to categorize a whole culture to just be on the left, I think the goal is for people to understand that this is our norm and we need people on every political party – except for the racists – to be on our side. And not just activists, but normal people you know what I'm saying? People that are non-activists, people that don't dare to be an activist. You can't expect everyone to be the way that I am, I am very outspoken and I'm very unafraid, but people are not just like that. Everyone is not like that. So of course the goal is to get people

protest, I mean do you know how many people from Sweden went to Standing Rock? We had so many Swedes that went there, for the Native Americans! They want to put a feather on their fucking head and pretend to be some kind of spirit animal. But they would never, never, go up north to do the same for us.

And I think that is also because, Sweden I mean, the history that we have, now you can really tell the difference tho between for example the US and Sweden. Sweden has been pretty protected from war, so the Swedish people don't know what a revolution is. The people in Sweden that have been abused are the Indigenous people, and the people that immigrate of course into Sweden. But the Swedish people have not been thru trauma. So I think this is a result of that, that when it comes down to it, they get too afraid. They will never choose a side. Like if you ask Swedish people what they vote for, 95% will not tell you. Ever. NEVER will they tell you. And if you do, you have a mark on your head and you will live with that for the rest of your life.

I mean so, that is like Gabriel said, it clashes. We have a lot of so called activists in Sweden, but to be honest, there's not a lot of real activism going on here in Sweden. And I can just agree to everything that he said and it was very interesting to hear him speak about it, he can see it from an outside perspective, because I think that Swedish people would probably not agree. And that is also why, it's kind of hard to live in this world because sometimes it feels like we have everyone against us, we can never do anything right. The whole culture and the way that we live and breathe up here just doesn't combine to anything else in Sweden. We have the same temple and this is of course the Swedish government has been very good at keeping quiet, like not teaching Sámi history. So when we claim our rights, people don't even know that we exist, it's kind of hard to claim your rights if they don't know that we exist. And then we get questioned about that.

So everything that Gabriel said is completely true. Which is sad! It's very sad.

TFSR: It is, and it's making me think of sort of something that

America and Australia and New Zealand, my sense was that, again very broadly speaking, the activist communities there with all the flaws and shortcomings and mistakes that we all make, at least had a very clear and I felt sincere ambition to be good allies, accomplices, collaborators, whatever the preferred terminology was, to Indigenous people, so to stand in solidarity with them.

And I kind of expected that to be the case here as well, but I don't think it is. So if you look at the non-Sámi activist communities in the Nordic countries, to me there was - and maybe it has changed since I got here - but I think there still is a surprising level of ignorance. I mean I'm simplifying here, but if you talk to the average leftist radical activist in, say, Stockholm, they're often very well versed in what's happening in Palestine, Chiapas, perhaps even on the Pine Ridge Reservation, but they're very ignorant about what's happening in Sápmi.

And I've thought about this a lot, and I think there are a few reasons for this and I've not really come to conclusions so these are kind of guesses, but I mean one thing is that this ignorance is a reflection of general ignorance among mainstream society here about the Sámi people. So in that sense it's a reflection, but I think there are other issues as well. One is, I think that historically the left (and that reaches from social democracy to the far left) in the Nordic countries was particularly technocratic and "progress" oriented. So industrialization, technological progress, science including at the beginning of the 20th century racial biology, all of that was supposed to be a way toward socialism and was considered progressive. So if you have that picture, Indigenous people like the Sámi are basically a stumbling block, they don't fit into this picture, so I think that is one thing that you can still feel people don't really know. Its something that doesn't fit into this historical leftist ideology and so people have a very difficult time dealing with that.

And more concretely, I think that is then enhanced by what I as a complete outsider because I am not even originally from the Nordic countries, see as a bit of a cultural problem. What I mean by that is that here in the Nordic countries, maybe particularly in Sweden, people often have a really hard time with dealing with conflict.

Whenever there is conflict, or there are certain issues that are complicated, people get very insecure and confused. Now if you look at the broad activist communities here, and the views that people have and the issues that are important and the norms that are often attached to it, some of them clash with the realities in Sápmi.

So to take an example, is like animal rights, people here on the left are often anti-hunting. Hunting is a part of traditional Sámi culture, reindeer herds are protected from predators, for example wolves. So here we have one example where that sort of clashes with what is often perceived as an anti-hunting norm. In the left, similar with environmentalism; people are in support of green energy, this is fine. However if you look at how that plays out in reality, wind parks are predominantly established in Sápmi because that's where they least disturb mainstream society although they majorly disturb reindeer herding. So there you have another conflict that some people on the left find difficult to deal with.

Also things like national identity, a lot of Sámi activists would speak of the Sami as a nation and find that important. We have one contributor to the book for example Aslak Holmberg, who speaks of cultural nationalism as something that's important. That clashes with some of the criticism of anything that has to do with the nation among the left here. So I think rather than addressing these issues and accepting that this is challenging, and thru dialogue and conversation which can be painful and complicated, modify your position or enhance your positions, people would rather just shy away from that and pretend it doesn't exist which means that very often, you know, Sámi issues would seem to become too "complicated". And I can't just as a final example which I thought illustrated this well, there is a well known Swedish writer who writes a lot about this situation in the northern provinces of Sweden, and urban rural divide, the social injustices implied in that. He doesn't write anything about the Sámi, and he once explained that saying "oh no, that topic is just too complicated, whenever you write it'll be wrong" meaning whatever you write someone will criticize you for that, perhaps harshly.

And while that may be true, and I understand on a personal

level that you don't want to put yourself in that position, if most people have that approach you will miss out on debate.

And then a third aspect that I might mention, and Maxida knows a lot about this because she has experienced all of this firsthand, is that if you look at the tactics that again, the sort of average Nordic activist employs, and that's nothing that's specific to the Nordic countries that's true for all of western europe, it is very much based on an urban environment. So you can be a pretty anonymous figure who attends protests and meetings, but if you want to go about your daily life you can do so pretty much undisturbed. This doesn't work in an environment like Sápmi, or any rural environment for that matter, because people know you and there's not place to hide if you're outspoken on certain issues. It also means the risks you're taking are much higher and the demands are very different, so I think to political activism. And what a lot of people in the urban general leftist activist communities are used to. So I think that creates another complication.

MM: You've done your job Gabriel!! Everything that you said is exactly how it is. I mean, that is so correct.

I mean, in Sweden people here are so afraid of conflict. And I'm sad to say that there is not a lot of true activists in Sweden. I have a word for this which essentially means a fake activist. I know a lot of people and a lot of so called activists groups that say that they fight for justice, when you come down to it it's not about justice at all it's about making yourself heard, about making yourself look cool, but when it comes to the source like what do we fight for? Or should we really fight, shouldn't we try to gather? They back out.

So like Gabriel said, there's a lot of so called activists, that it clashes with the Sami way of living. One example is one of my close friends, he got prison, seven years of prison, because he was accused of killing a wolverine. And I can tell you that his family, they got so thrashed for years from the so called activists, the animal friends. So I mean, we struggle with both the politicians in Sweden, the Swedish government, and the so called activists. A lot of the the Indigenous friendly people are allowed to go to the US to